

# Design OF THE TIMES

Decor experts divulge the season's best reception looks, and how to use them to share what's in your heart

BY NATASHA GARBER

A ballroom is just a ballroom—but a ballroom filled with flowers and color and light and texture and everything true and memorable about two people in love? Now that's a wedding. When you set out to design your reception, remember that how your room looks will determine, more than anything else, how your guests feel. Here, some of the leading minds in wedding design share hot trends, cool ideas and their best advice for creating not just a pretty space, but the experience of a lifetime.

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SHOW YOUR COLORS

Hot, tropical hues or the palest petal pink? Sherbet tones or jewel tones? Dark with bright or white-on-white? Your choice in reception palette likely will be one of the first planning decisions you'll have to make as a bride-to-be. It's also one of your most

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important. If you're having trouble deciding which hues to use, these emerging trends may sway you.

It's no surprise that Southern California, home to Hollywood and beach culture and Technicolor sunsets, is the birthplace of many of the country's most inspiring wedding color trends. Wedding designer Carolyn Chen of Los Angeles-based The Special Day Event Design & Coordination, notes that her brides crave colors—rich, intense colors that collide beautifully rather than coordinate. As the once-provocative pairing of Tiffany blue and brown makes its way out, Chen is replacing it with combinations of “light aqua and burgundy, or Santorini blue and magenta or lilac,” she says. She notes that these marine-inspired color combos “are especially popular for the ocean-view or oceanfront resorts and estates that Southern California is known for.”

Her finger firmly on the pulse of ever-evolving wedding decor trends, Carissa Jones of couture floral and event styling firm JL Designs sees color taking a softer, but decidedly more sophisticated turn. “Gray is the new brown. Navy is the new black,” says the designer, who caters to a fashion-forward, urban-chic clientele. As for long-admired purple? “It is still really popular,” Jones notes. “We are seeing more in shades of eggplant and plum [rather than] lavender and royal purple, though.”

According to celebrated Houston decor expert Jan Cancila of The Linen House, today's weddings come in two different shades: “Either the wedding has a very comforting, traditional feel with a monochromatic white or ivory color scheme”—The Linen House carries everything from Ivory Pintuck to Platinum Satin—“or the wedding is really ‘out there,’ with intense colors and even patterned fabrics”—cue The Linen House's Tangerine Dupioni,



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Sunrise-Blue Flocked and Ruffled Celadon.

LIGHT MAKES RIGHT

When you are working out the details of—not to mention budgeting for—your reception design, “Don’t underestimate the importance of lighting,” cautions Jones. “It is the easiest way to add ambience to any environment.”

Chen says she’s gratified to see that her brides “are having a better understanding of the importance of lighting and how it ultimately defines the ambience and environment of their reception.” Indoors, Chen recommends patterned gobos to “help mask any walls that are plain, uninviting or unattractive.” She cites themed projections as another growing trend:

*Lighting is the easiest way to add ambience to any environment.*

“If you want to have the feeling you are in a beautiful field of flowers, these images can be projected, and the flowers can seem as if they are moving with the wind,” even inside a breezeless hotel ballroom.

Specialty lighting isn’t just for interiors, either. Gobos can be used to “bring more texture and design” to everything from lawns to walkways to exterior walls, Chen says. You can use lighting, too, in the landscape surrounding your chosen venue: “Varying colors of uplights in the surrounding trees will make a much bigger impact than just lighting candles,”

Chen suggests.

Lighting designer Frank Tritico of Houston’s Bright Star Productions reminds brides that, “Lighting is a subtle art, not a show. It is meant to blend in, it is meant to be a part of the environment.” To determine just what that environment should be, Tritico speaks directly to all his brides, rather than simply to their coordinators or florists. “When I meet with a bride, we talk about feelings, about what she’s trying to get across,” he explains. “When you close your eyes, you have something in your mind’s eye. You don’t see orange, you see exuberance. You don’t see passive blue, you see peace. To be able to communicate with people is the goal. If I can do that, I can make anything happen.”

To make the process easier, Tritico often suggests that the bride put copies of all her communications with all her vendors into a single notebook, so that she has all of her decor details collected in a single resource. That way, when Tritico says, “‘What are your linens? What are your flowers?’ she’ll say, ‘Burgundy, with tall, twiggy centerpieces.’ So I can say, ‘OK, let’s do something in a deep rose color—not red, but a deep shade that’s closer to your overlay.’”

Brides who bring their lighting needs to Bright Star don’t just enjoy the benefit of Tritico’s technical expertise and emotion-centered approach. They also get the peace of mind of knowing what their lighting will look like, long before the big day arrives. “We have a 1,000-square-foot client showroom with a seating area,” the designer notes. In the space, brides, grooms, coordinators and assorted opinion-givers can preview the effects of different kinds of LED lights, pinspots and incandescent

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lights. “Some people can see in their mind’s eye over the telephone, when I describe [the lighting proposal],” Tritico says. For everyone else, visiting the Bright Star showroom is an illuminating experience.

SHELTER CHIC

Planning a spring celebration? Kitty Dalmolin-Wilbanks of Houston’s Aztec Events & Tents says nothing makes for a more beautiful spring wedding reception than an “old-style pole tent.” With their classic, refined elegance, pole tents are making a big comeback, the event specialist notes. “We have so many different ways to wrap the inner poles and outer poles ... for a really clean look,” she says.

To soften and add texture and color

*No design consideration is more important than location, location, location.*

to the tent interior, Aztec might use soft-white satin, off-white poly-muslin or an ethereal sheer, either by itself or layered with other complementary textiles. Also popular are sheer-swagged or wrapped legs, for “a more structured look, but soft,” Dalmolin-Wilbanks says.

As important as the tent itself is the flooring and carpet the bride selects. “We’re doing anything from sisal or sea grass to white turf, which looks really good, especially with lighting,” Dalmolin-Wilbanks notes. “With flooring, we might not tent to the very end of the flooring, to leave open areas beyond

the edge of the tent,” she adds.

The effect is a sort of balcony or patio, which may extend 20 feet beyond the tent, and can be set up with string lighting, bistro tables and a decorative railing.

Inside the tent, it’s all about comfortable sophistication. Big with brides for the coming season are benches, “even for dining,” Dalmolin-Wilbanks says. Also popular are soft seating and lounge furniture, including sofas, cubes, banquettes and end tables.

SITE INSPECTION

Whether their forté is lighting or floral or furniture, wedding decor experts across the board agree on one thing: No design consideration is more important than location, location, location.

“You have to take into account your surroundings... that is the number one factor” in any wedding design scheme, notes Jones.

Texan Kathy Mazza, now co-owner of Los Angeles-based Bella Weddings & Events, advises, “When you begin looking at wedding venues, think about the feeling you want for your day—are you looking for an intimate romantic setting or a clean modern space? Do you want your ceremony in an indoor or outdoor setting? Would you like the convenience of a hotel or resort, or the seclusion of a private estate? All of these factors will help you to determine the overall look and feel for the ceremony and reception.” She notes that she and partner Susan White “always suggest choosing decor elements that complement a venue and don’t compete with or overpower existing decor.”

Cancila concurs: “Finding a location that reflects the bride’s style is crucial.” She notes that many of the

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brides she works with are “opting for tented weddings on the family property, art gallery receptions, restaurant dinners or any meaningful location that can host the event.” Meanwhile, “Destination weddings are still popular,” but with the considerations of budget and of guest comfort and

*Your design and décor should tie in together and flow from beginning to end.*

convenience playing a more prominent role, “the destination is more often than not a resort property

within a day’s drive of the city.”

SO VERY YOU

Whatever venue gets your vote, whatever colors you crave, whatever flowers or linens or lights you choose, “Make it personal,” Mazza says. “Don’t forget that this is a day celebrating you and your fiancé, and details that highlight your interests, favorite things, or special elements of your relationship are what make the day meaningful and memorable for your guests.”

Chen adds, “Don’t try to incorporate everything you see that you may like from other weddings into your own reception decor. Keep in mind that your wedding should be a reflection of you as a couple. Your design and décor should all tie in together and flow from beginning to end.”

As for Tritico, he reminds brides, “This is a once-in-a-lifetime occasion. No matter what, leave something to be surprised by on your wedding day. If you’re going into an event where you know every single little bitty detail, where is the joy in that? Where is the surprise in that?” No, you probably don’t want to leave it to your florist to decide how many centerpieces to make, or leave it to your rental company to pick your tablecloths. But maybe it’s a monogram on the dance floor your lighting company surprises you with, or an unexpected spread of rose petals your florist sprinkles on the cake table, Tritico says. “Think of it as a gift to yourself.”



Illuminate your big day


Photo: Suzanne Ammirato



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